Go To Joseph!

by Clementine Lenta

"GO TO JOSEPH!" has long been a directive of saints and popes, yet how many of us do go to Joseph? Next to Our Blessed Mother, there is no greater saint but, sad to say, too often we ignore him — this, in spite of the fact that the Church has dedicated the month of March to him, has established several feasts in his honor, and has proclaimed him patron of the Church, of the family, of the worker, and of the dying.

Which of us, therefore, does not need his help? Which of us can afford to ignore him in the difficulties and problems of our lives and at the time of our deaths?

Perhaps we take St. Joseph so much for granted because we rarely stop to think about him and so we do not know him and do not appreciate him. A little thoughtful reading of the Gospels and a little knowledge of the life of his times reveal many things about St. Joseph.

We know that Joseph was a carpenter, a working man, but he was also of the royal lineage of David. Among his ancestors were Abraham and David. If

the kingdom of Jerusalem had been established in favor of the Jewish race, Joseph could have been a noble but the descendants of David had become a conquered people, the Jewish throne was destroyed, and so Joseph lost his right to royalty with all of its power, wealth and prestige. Still, God chose him — above all men — to be the Foster-Father of His Divine Son, the King of Kings; to be, after Mary, an effective instrument in the work of the redemption.

Since the all-wise God predestined Joseph to be the head of the Holy Family and the protector of Jesus and Mary, it is beyond question that God must have given him extraordinary graces to be worthy of such a marvelous privilege. In fact, the Gospel speaks of Joseph as "a just man," *i.e.*, a holy man, a man of outstanding goodness.

Query: Is the example which we give to our family and to others — our speech, our actions and our works — such that we can readily be recognized as "good" Catholics?

Joseph's role as a common workman and his residence in a small, insignificant village were natural aspects of a hidden, humble life. Humble must have been his unsuccessful seeking of shelter at Bethlehem for the birth of the Holy Infant; and humble, too, must have been his inability to furnish anything but a pair of turtle doves for the offering at the presentation of the Divine Babe at the Temple.

Query: Are we content with our lot in life? Do we refrain from trying to keep-up or out-do "the Joneses?" Do we quietly work in parochial endeavors and apostolic efforts or must we always be in the limelight?

JOSEPH'S obedience to the Will of God is clearly manifested in his quick response to the Angel's messages to leave Bethlehem and go into the foreign land of Egypt; and later, to leave Egypt and return, not to Bethlehem, but to Nazareth. Joseph's obedience to the law of his Faith is evidenced in his fulfilling its precepts for the circumcision of the Child, for the presentation of the Holy

Infant at the Temple, and for bringing the 12-year-old Jesus to the Temple, according to Jewish custom. And Joseph's obedience to lawful civil authority is shown in the journey which he and Mary undertook from Nazareth to Bethlehem — this, regardless of the difficulties and the inconvenience that they could have avoided by staying at Nazareth.

Query: Are we truly obedient to the commandments of God and the laws of His Church or do we set forth our own little arguments as excuses for disobeying? Do we obey lawful civil authority?

Though Joseph could not understand how Mary, a professed virgin, could be with child, still he left the anguish of his dilemma up to God. And then when he had almost decided that he must follow the laws of his religion and must "put her away privately," God solved his problem by sending an angel to tell Joseph not to be concerned for "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."

Query: How deep is our trust in God's loving providence? Do we turn to Him in sincere, constant prayer for enlightenment and assistance in the problems which confront us? Do we seek solutions based on the teachings of Christ and His Church?

St. Joseph accepted his role as head of the Holy Family, not only in providing for the needs of Jesus and Mary and protecting them through the dangerous flight into Egypt, but also in seeing to it that the "Child advanced in wisdom and in grace."

According to Jewish law, the father was the first and the official teacher of his children. Just as soon as a child learned to speak, the good Jewish father began his religious instructions. So, the devout Joseph must have taught Jesus the fundamental texts of the Scriptures, as well as the Commandments. He must also have helped the Child memorize psalms for special occasions and prayed along with Him.

Query: Am I a truly Catholic parent? Do I provide not only for the material

comfort of my children but also — and with great vigilance — attend to my responsibility in seeing to it that they learn about God and the true doctrines of His Church so that they, too, may "advance in wisdom and grace"?

THE JOURNEY from Nazareth to Bethlehem at a time when Mary expected delivery of the God-child, must have been very difficult and the deep disappointment at being turned away from the inn and other places of shelter must have been heart-breaking to Joseph. The subsequent flight into Egypt and certainly the loss of the Holy Child in Jerusalem must have been frightful trials to Joseph — times requiring great faith and patience, times to pray, to do the best that he could under the circumstances, and to trust in God for deliverance.

Query: How do we react to the anxieties, struggles and sufferings of our daily lives? Do we complain or do we accept them patiently, do the best that we can about them, and turn to God for assistance, according to His Will?

Through the ministry of His angels, God specifically directed and assisted St. Joseph in many of his difficulties. The Gospels relate that an angel appeared to Joseph, relieving him of his anxiety about Mary's pregnancy; later an angel warned him about the dangers to the life of the Holy Infant; and still later, an angel advised him to take the Child and His mother back into the land of Israel.

Query: Do we recognize the existence of the angels given to us by God to be our special allies against Satan and his cohorts? Among these are the great archangels, Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, as well as our Guardian Angels who are especially assigned to personally protect and assist each one of us. Do we turn to the angels often in prayer?

Joseph spent his adult life serving Jesus and Mary in joy and in sorrow, to the best of his ability. At his death he had the great privilege and consolation of dying in their presence.

Query: Do we live "in the presence of

Jesus and Mary" — in sickness and in health, in sadness and in joy — in a life which will bring us a holy, peaceful death in Their presence and that of St. Joseph?

Throughout the centuries people from all walks in life have revered St. Joseph, sought his help, and received innumerable favors through his intercession. Some were sinners, some were saints, some were popes.

Among the saints was St. Theresa of Avila. This remarkable saint — proclaimed *Doctor of the Church* by Pope Paul VI on September 27, 1970 — attributed the cure of a serious illness to St. Joseph and when she entered the Carmelite Order, she did all that she could to honor him and to foster devotion to him. She wrote many beautiful tributes to him, dedicated 15 of her foundations to him, and ordered that his statue be placed above the doors of her convents.

AMONG the popes especially devoted to St. Joseph was Pius IX. On December 8, 1870 he declared St. Joseph patron of

the Universal Church and urged all bishops to spread devotion to the saint. He often spoke of St. Joseph as, after our Blessed Mother, the hope of the Church.

"If Mary and Joseph," he often said, "find again the place that they never should have lost in men's hearts, the whole world will be saved. Go to Joseph! Have confidence in him, for his protection as the patron of the Church is most powerful. *Go to Joseph!*"

N.B. This article was originally published in *Our Sunday Visitor*. Reprinted here by permission.

Consecration to St. Joseph

BELOVED Saint Joseph, adopt me as your child, take care of my salvation, watch over me day and night, preserve me from the occasion of sin, obtain for me purity of soul and body! Through your intercession with Jesus grant me a spirit of sacrifice, of humility and self-denial, a great love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and a tender love for Mary, my Mother.

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Recommendation

A recent special tribute to St. Joseph is the issuance of a beautiful medal produced by the Capuchin Fathers, together with an inspiring booklet entitled *St. Joseph Today.* The medal is cast in gold, purple and white colors indicative of St. Joseph's justice, humility and purity. A touch of red symbolizes the Holy Spirit and the redeeming, suffering love of Christ.

The booklet, *St. Joseph Today,* presents St. Joseph as a modern model to follow so that we may learn to live, pray and work in the presence of Jesus and Mary, as he did. It is attractive, timely, interesting and very readable. In fact, there is something in it for everyone's benefit.

The medal and the booklet may be obtained from the Capuchin Fathers, 4121 Harewood Road, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017. (Free will offering for one or two medals; for more, please inquire about prices.)